
COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Introduction

The parish of Cranbrook was created in May 2015 following an initial community governance review conducted by East Devon District Council (EDDC). The decision to create the new parish of Cranbrook was made by EDDC's Cabinet on 2 April 2014, minute 218.

The Cabinet decision reflected the clear sense of identity felt by long-standing residents of Rockbeare parish occupying homes along the northern extent of the London Road who had made representations during the review. These representations were supported by the elected District and County representative at the time.

The resultant boundary for the new parish of Cranbrook is set out on the plan attached at appendix A. This is the current boundary today and it can clearly be seen how the southern boundary of the town mirrors the rear garden boundaries of pre-existing properties along the north side of London Road – these properties remain in Rockbeare parish.

Cranbrook Expansion

The Cranbrook Plan (DPD) sets out proposals for the expansion of Cranbrook. These plans will take Cranbrook to a town of around 8,000 homes by the end of the current Local Plan period (2016-2031). Examination of the Cranbrook DPD is currently unresolved with resolution of viability issues outstanding. However whilst that is so it is considered that the plans are sufficiently advanced as to place reliance on the future determination of the boundary of Cranbrook.

To date valid planning applications have been submitted for development to the west at Bluehayes and to the south at Grange. The Bluehayes outline is at appendix B and the Grange application which is the area immediately to the west of Gribble Lane is at appendix C.

Details of future expansion at Cobdens, Treasbeare and further development at Grange is outlined in the Cranbrook Plan policies map which is at appendix D.

Impact on Cranbrook Parish Boundary

Cranbrook was created initially on land where the boundaries of four parish councils met. Most of the original land was in Broadclyst parish but there was an impact on Rockbeare, Clyst Honiton and Whimple. A future boundary review will have impact on all four parishes again with perhaps the least on Broadclyst.

(a) Northern Boundary

The northern boundary of Cranbrook parish falls conveniently along the Exeter – Waterloo railway line with the exception of a small section to the west around Broadclyst Station. Given the known boundary of the Bluehayes expansion area it is proposed that this remains unchanged.

(b) Western Boundary

The current western boundary of Cranbrook parish is coterminous with the western boundary of the Bluehayes expansion area and therefore it is proposed that this remains unchanged in so far as it joins the B3174.

(c) Southern Treasbeare Boundary

This represents a new part of the town and it is proposed that the boundary review encompasses all of the proposed development area including the suitable alternative natural greenspaces (SANGs). This is shown on the Policies Map at appendix D.

(d) Southern Grange Boundary

This too represents a new part of the town and it is proposed that the boundary review encompasses all of the proposed development area including the SANGs. This is shown on the Policies Map at appendix D.

(e) Eastern Boundary

This represents a new part of the town and it is proposed that the boundary review encompasses all of the proposed development area including the SANGs. This is shown on the Policies Map at appendix D.

(f) London Road (between Treasbeare and Grange)

As indicated on the current Cranbrook parish plan at Appendix A, the Cranbrook parish boundary runs behind the gardens of the existing properties along the northern side of London Road. The Policies Map at Appendix D proposes that the Cranbrook development area at this point is south of the London Road and as such encompasses all of the pre-existing properties on the northern side of the road as well as a number of existing properties on the southern side of London Road. The proposals in the Policies Map state that this area is the “London Road commercial and retail proposals”. At the time of writing it is very unlikely that this area will come forward as such and therefore the recommendation is that the London Road southern boundary of Cranbrook Parish remain as it is today. This proposal, if accepted, would allow the pre-existing properties along London Road to remain in the parish of Rockbeare.

Impact on the Surrounding Parishes

As indicated above, the lowest impact of a governance review would be on Broadclyst parish with no change to the current arrangements. Members will be aware that the separation of Cranbrook from existing settlements was a key element in development of the town. The existing boundary proposals maintain that separation for properties at Broadclyst Station and along Station Road and there is no desire to change that.

The impact on Clyst Honiton parish is predominantly loss of agricultural land including one farm property which would fall within the town boundary.

Rockbeare parish would also forfeit agricultural land on the northern edge of its parish. This land falls within the Rockbeare neighbourhood plan area and the parish has in place an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. How this is managed going forward following a boundary review needs to be determined by EDDC. Rockbeare's position is that they are opposed to any development south of London Road. However the Cranbrook Plan includes such development and it will be for the local planning authority and the Planning Inspector to determine the way forward in terms of the location of development and for the District Council to resolve the conflict between any boundary review and an adopted neighbourhood plan. In planning policy terms adoption of the Cranbrook Plan would override the Rockbeare neighbourhood plan.

Whimble Parish has established its neighbourhood plan area as coterminous with its parish boundary. To date its neighbourhood plan has not been adopted. Whimble parish would lose agricultural land as a result of the proposed boundary review and similar consideration apply as indicated with regard to Rockbeare above, albeit the situation is slightly different as the Whimble neighbourhood plan is yet to be adopted.

Policy Considerations

The following reasons are put forward in support of a Community Governance Review:

The proposed changes:

- reflect the growth of the town both now and in the future;
- allow the electoral arrangements to reflect the growth of the town;
- make for effective and convenient local government particularly in reducing the need for estate rent charges, the effective and efficient management of open space and the maintenance of SANGs;
- prevent expansion areas crossing local government boundaries which otherwise would result in anomalies with people being in different parishes from their immediate neighbours;
- provide an opportunity to put in place strong and clearly defined boundaries which are tied to firm ground features;
- provide convenient boundaries for future District and County Council elections.
- establish a sense of place, an inclusive community, a sense of pride, community cohesion, civic values and make for effective and convenient local governance.
- bring together a town where the community has similar life opportunities and expectations;
- represent a distinctive and recognisable community;
- provide the best opportunity to influence future planning.

Number of Councillors

Conduct of parish council business does not usually require a large body of councillors. In addition, historically many parish councils, particularly smaller ones, have found difficulty in attracting sufficient candidates to stand for election. This has led to uncontested elections and/or a need to co-opt members in order to fill vacancies. This has also been the experience in Cranbrook.

Guidance on councillor numbers indicates that towns of between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants normally attract between 13 and 27 councillors. Towns of over 20,000 between 13 and 31 councillors. Exmouth has 25, Honiton 20 and Sidmouth 15 although with the exception of Sidmouth there are vacancies.

There are no recommendations to increase the number of councillors at Cranbrook.

Warding

Warding normally takes place when

- a) the number, or distribution of the local government electors for the parish would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and
- b) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented.

This is not the case in Cranbrook and there are no recommendations for the Town to be warded.

Recommendation

That the Town Clerk write to the Chief Executive of East Devon District Council to request that a community governance review be conducted to revise the parish boundary of Cranbrook to properly reflect the planned expansion of the town.

Cllr Ray Bloxham
6 October 2020